

Dual Dimensions: When Worlds Collide

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Summary: War has ever hovered on the horizon of the land of Hayrule like a lurking specter, and Skyward, a Haylian unicorn mare, has ever answered the call of battle when needed, seeking to protect her home, hearth and kin. But after a terrible battle with a pair of wizened unicorn nags, Skyward awakens to find herself in a world that is NOT Hayrule, and fears the worst has happened...

1. A Silent Departure

The sun slowly began to rise, its warming golden rays heralding the start of a new day. The translucent lances of gold filtered through the lush emerald veil of leaves and branches, gilding Nature in its golden glory where it went. Birds would soon rouse from their nests, to fill the air with their cheery songs, followed by the lowing of the cattle and goats waiting to be fed, the shriek of the cuccos in their pens, then the bustle of busy ponies rising from their beds in the peaceful Fiador Village to do their daily routines...

Or so it would have been, if the alarm bell hadn't been ringing near off its mount, the terrible sounds of battle filling the air, and smoke rising to the dawn tinted skies above. Doors all over the village began to fly open, stallions brandishing various weapons while clad in sleepwear/ hastily donned armor rushing out of their homes to meet the invaders...huge pig like monsters armed with spears, shields, clubs, and the ones in the back had bows and arrows: arrows tipped with burning coals to start fires where they landed. The deep green skinned porcine creatures were easily three to four feet taller than an average stallion, and about three times as wide, half fat, half muscle. They wore crude leather armor that looked to have been gotten off the back of a scrap cart somewhere, and their weapons were either crudely made or clearly stolen, given their decent craftsmanship.

Bearing sword, shield, spear, club or mace, clad in mostly sleeping garb, stallions and not a few mares charged at the oversized beasts while a few chosen others led the foals and elderly away from the

battleground deeper into the village proper. Heat shimmered in the air, flames licking at rooftops and chimneys, smoke rising to the skies like living banners of death, the cacophony of screams, shrieks, battle roars and the song of steel enough to make one go deaf.

Pegasi swooped from the skies to divebomb the monsters, harrying them with spear, wind gust and thunder clouds, with the occasional kick to the head if they felt they could get away with it. Snarling, the monsters tried to swipe at their harriers with their own weapons, frothing at the mouth, spitting and hissing curses in the foul tongue of the Barren Wastes. A few of them were lucky enough to clip a couple of the swooping pegasi with their weapons, but that just left them wide open for the earth ponies to come charging in, delivering vicious strikes to their midsections, legs, or even 'sensitive areas'.

****"PUSH THEM BACK, MY BRETHREN! SHOW NO MERCY!"****

The near leonine like roar echoed through the village; the stallion who had bellowed that order a powerful looking specimen indeed. He was clearly an earth pony, with a dark gray colored coat and a dark green mane, his massive hooves slamming into the gut of another huge pig monster. The beast doubled over with a _'whouf'_ of expelled foul breath, clearly having been suckerhoofed...only to be blasted backwards and into some of its porcine brethren by an aura covered boulder that had come from just behind the huge muscle bound stallion. More lances of magic: frost, fire, lightning and more rocks erupted from the back, the thunder of hooves signaling the arrival of the unicorns, who lived further back in the village. Another vile pig lumbered forward, his axe raised high to cut down a helpless pegasus whose wing had been clipped, and he was unable to fly, dazed from his fall. Before the axe could swing down...

Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee...

It was faint at first, but slowly growing louder. The whistling noise grew steadily in pitch, and as such it got the pig's attention; it paused in its downward swing, stupidly turning towards the source of the noise...

That was when a bluish-silver blur crashed at magically enhanced speed right into its bulging stomach and sent it sprawling head over heels in the dirt before it slammed into the side of someone's house. Stunned, it remained there...and turned out to be easy pickings for a few more earth ponies who were nearby. The pegasus looked up to see a unicorn mare clad in a light linen shift standing close by, chest heaving, flanks slick with sweat, and dripping dark ichor from her sharpened horn point onto her face and onto the ground. The mare's eyes were a beautiful royal blue color, her coat the color of polished blue tinted steel, and her mane matched her eyes, with a streak of indigo running through it. But unlike her pegasus friend, she had no cutie mark as of yet.

She snorted, shook her head to rid her horn of the dripping fluid and pulled him to his hooves. "Art thou all right, Rushing Zephyr?"

The shaken pegasus male nodded, fluffing out his wings and shaking himself out. "Aye, for the moment. I owe thee my life, Skyward."

"Neigh, thou owe me nothing. How is thy wing? Art thou good to fly?"

The cerulean blue and silver colored pegasus with a swirling updraft of feathers cutie mark on his flanks stretched his wing, moved it experimentally up and down and winced a little, but nodded his head at her. "I can fly, if not fast. What would thou have me do?"

Skyward pointed to the air with one hoof even as she used her magic to grab a discarded sword that had fallen close by, a shimmering silver aura surrounding the weapon as she tested its edge with one hoof. "Scout ahead, see if thee can find their leader. Report to mine brother Tempest Wing with all speed if thou do, and keep out of sight! If thy injury troubles thou further, make haste to the healers at once!"

Rushing Zephyr nodded his silver maned head and went airborne, soon becoming a speck among the clouds in the now blue sky. Skyward turned her attention back to the battle, running along the packed dirt path, hooves pounding out a savage tattoo as she cast her gaze about for any more of the beasts...

Sudden! Movement! Out of the corner of her right eye!

She raised the sword in her magic just in time to block a deadly overhead slash from a Moblin (for that's what the creature was) lurking in the shadows in between two houses close together. The porcine creature heaved against the unicorn's parry, trying to break her ground or upset her balance. The smell coming off of the creature was disgusting indeed: old blood, feces and piss to name a few. The smell threatened to make her choke, but she grimly held fast, eyes burning with hatred and fury. Baring her teeth in defiance and rage, Skyward pushed back against the beast, digging her hooves into the ground to further her resistance. Inch by inch, however, the monster was beginning to overpower her...she being a mare she didn't have the raw muscle a stallion had.

Spotting an object close by, she reached out with a little more magic, and picked up a small clay pot from to the left and behind the pig. She allowed herself to be pushed back-juuuust a tad, just enough for it to think it was going to win...and brought it crashing down onto its head from above. It didn't faze it too much, but it did distract it long enough for her to hit him with a forward hoof thrust. The Moblin staggered back at the blow, but it was enough for her to deliver a killing strike to the chest, her sword burying itself between the monster's ribs to seek the vile heart beneath. Eyes bulging, its grotesque tongue hanging out of its foul maw as blood spurted from its lips and dripped down its jowls. Face frozen eternal in a mask of pain and disbelief, it crashed to the ground with a wheezing squeal and lay still.

Dark blood splattered her face, mane and her linen shift, but she paid it no mind as she shook it off, a terrible smile tugging at her lips as she yanked her blade free and charged off after the main host of fighting ponies. The sun had risen by this point, and as a result it was much easier to see now. The pig creatures knew this too, and their raid being largely unsuccessful, had decided to retreat. Some of the unicorns were putting out the fires on the houses, aided by

some of the pegasi, while the rest of the pony village chased the monsters into the surrounding woods. Once the last one was gone, the herd stopped their pursuit, chests heaving, hooves stomping, wings flapping...

"Mossy Boulder, art they gone?"

The huge dark gray pony with a cutie mark of a rolling moss covered boulder on his flank turned to look at the magenta and ocher unicorn stallion who had approached him. His great brown eyes bored into the unicorn's crimson ones, a grim look on his rugged features.

"For now, Blazing Dawn. But we must be vigilant and step up patrols. We can not rely on aid from the Haylian Army, stretched thin as they are from the war in the Barren Wastes."

Blazing Dawn nodded his head as a black and gold pegasus with a triple winged thunderbolt cutie mark on his flanks shot down from the heavens, landing next to the unicorn male. "Rushing Zephyr reported to me earlier, Father. He spotted their leader...he's twice as big as the others and carries a huge battleaxe, and better armor as well. He lost sight of them once they rounded the bend into Hayrule Field given his wing is injured."

Mossy Boulder gave a single nod to his winged son, thumping his son's shoulder in approval. "Well done, Tempest Wing. Where is thy sister?"

"I am here, Father." Skyward approached the group, the sword held low and to her side so she wouldn't hit anypony with it. Mossy Boulder regarded his daughter, a faint smile touching his mouth. "Got a few of them then, did ye?"

"Aye. I'll not stand idly by while these beasts defile our home." She stomped a hoof to emphasize her point, and Mossy Boulder nudged her gently. "Ye fight as well as thy mother once did. Ye have made me proud, my daughter."

Skyward inclined her head to her sire, and Mossy Boulder began barking orders to the other villagers to begin cleanup and restoring the village. Pegasi began to clear away the soggy, dirty shingles that covered some of the roofs, unicorns levitating up tools and such as earth ponies clambered around to mend and inspect damage-groups of ponies helping to haul away the dead bodies of the beasts for disposal.

Tempest Wing flexed his wings before folding them to his sides. "No casualties, Father?"

"None this time 'round, Tempest, thank Din, sadly we do have many injured this time. Take a squadron and patrol the forest, right away. The bastards may decide to return after dark, and we must be ready for them, if they do decide to 'visit' anon."

"Aye, Father. Oi, Sky, mayhap thy might earn thy cutie mark the next battle?"

Tempest playfully tugged at his sister's mane in passing, who aimed a kick at him in turn, snorting at him as he grinned, waved down to her and flew off.

Skyward snorted, her horn glimmering silver as she debated throwing a rock or a glob of mud at her brother's retreating figure. "Oooohhh...next time, I shalt braid and be-ribbon his Goddesses-bedamned mane for that..."

Mossy Boulder laughed heartily, nudging his daughter's shoulder as he indicated for her to walk with him. "Pay him no mind, my child. I have a special task for thee."

"What would thou have me do, Father?" The huge stallion was silent for a time, the only sound their hooves on the earth beneath them. The scent of the woods rose around them-rich loam, dry leaves and twigs, fresh grass and water as he led her to the Emerald River. He lowered his head to take a drink, Skyward moving a little downstream to wash the blood and sweat off of herself. She removed her torn and stained linen shift, using her magical aura to wash her fur and mane, before she strode out and shook herself somewhat dry like a dog. She draped her ruined shift over herself, out of modesty, and glanced at her sire.

"Father? What ails thy thoughts?" Mossy Boulder seemed to be thinking very hard about something, because he did not answer his daughter right away. He turned to look at her, a serious expression on his rugged features.

"I know thou have not obtained your cutie mark yet...but it must be thou, there is no choice. Ye must leave the village. Ye must run with all haste to Hayrule Castle."

Needless to say, Skyward was shocked near silent. Ponies that hadn't earned their cutie marks yet weren't allowed to go out of the village...it went against their traditions!

"...Father, forgive mine objection! I have not earned my mark yet! Who would listen to a markless pony? And, what makes thee think Princess Zelda wouldst be able to aid us? Thou said it thyself, the Haylian Army is stretched thin..."

The mare shut up instantly when her father lifted one great hoof and slammed it authoritatively against the ground, giving her a gimlet look that warned her not to trifle with him.

"Do not question me, young filly. Ye are skilled with a blade and magic, and ye know how to use them well. Go to our abode, dress thyself proper and hie thee to my chambers. In the chest in front of my bed, there is a sword and shield for thee to use, since thou know the way is no longer safe. There thou will also find a sealed scroll...do not open it, tis' for the Princess's eyes alone. I shalt leave thou saddlebags laden with provisions and tools for travel in the kitchen. Once that scroll is delivered, the Princess shalt instruct thee further. Understood?"

Skyward backed her ears, her body tensing in defiance, but she knew her father wouldn't be swayed, and she nodded mutely. "I shalt do as thee command, Father."

Mossy Boulder gazed at his daughter for a long moment before he reached out with one leg and pulled the unicorn close to him in a fierce embrace.

>"Goddesses keep thee safe, my child. One final thing; do not travel through Hayrule Field at night. Stop at Bridleriko Village for the night, then make haste with all speed to Hayrule Castle Town before the next eve falls. You will find plenty of snaffles in the saddlebags I have for thee."<p>

Skyward nuzzled her father in return, before she turned and began cantering towards the house she lived in with her brother and sire. She ran up the stairs and went right to her room, throwing the ruined sleeping gown aside and opening her armoire.

Unlike most mares around the village, she chose to wear tunics and not dresses, she finding them silly and restrictive. She pulled out a dark blue tunic, yanked it on and belted it around her barrel, running a brush through her mane and tail, then she braided part of her mane away from her face, securing it with a pair of polished wooden pins shaped like wings her brother had gifted her one Midwinter Festival. She grabbed a small satchel and began filling it with a few things...a horn sharpening stone, her brush, a set of hoofpicks, a medium sized bag that clinked and clicked lightly before she stuck it inside of the satchel and closed it securely.

Her hair done, she exited her room, walked down the hall and to the left, then opened the door to her sire's bedroom. The oaken chest in front of the massive bed glowed silver as she opened the lid, and stuck her head inside. Sure enough, a sealed scroll bearing her father's cutie mark on the seal lay inside, atop a wrapped bundle. She lifted out the scroll, and then the bundle itself. She removed the length of rough brown cloth that hid the items beneath...

Her eyes widened and she sprang back, the sword and shield dropping to the floor with a loud CLANK-CLATTER as she lost her grip on them, staring at the items with her mouth open.

The shield in question was not made of wood...it was wood bound in worked steel. The background of the shield was a deep blue color, the polished steel work making intricate raised designs in the dark azure field. A crimson alicorn with wings spread seeming to fly upward was at the lower half of the shield, the tip of the horn pointing up to the symbol of the royal family of Hayrule...

The legendary Triforce.

It was a Haylian Shield. Just like one that a Guardspony of Hayrule would bear.

Her mind boiled with questions, but her father's orders rang clear in her head, and she bit her lower lip, snatching up the shield, and then the sword in her magic. She unsheathed the blade...a smile crossed her face despite herself at the craftsmanship of the sword...sharp and ready to be used for what it was made for. She sheathed it and slung it over herself, securing the strap to her barrel and slinging the shield to her back soon after. She picked up the scroll in her magic and headed downstairs, heading for the kitchen. True to her sire's words, a pair of plain leather saddlebags plus a deep blue cloak with a cowl awaited her on a peg near the back door that led outside close to the cucco pen, and she removed them, securing both to herself after putting the scroll safely into the left bag and striding out the door. She kept out of the path of most ponies, choosing to go through alleyways and behind most of the

houses, not wanting to be seen by anypony, until she got to the Verdant Gate.

This gate was a work of woodcraft in of itself...massive oak trees magically bound and woven from unicorn and earth pony magic to create a living barricade, the pegasi making sure the entirety was kept healthy at the canopy level by removing dead branches and pruning as needed to make sure there was no overgrowth that would go awry or any dangerous creatures nesting in the branches. Sadly, the gate was twisted, slightly burned and broken-it would take a bit of time for them to repair it.

Skyward took hold of one of the gate doors with her magic and pulled it open a bit further, so she wouldn't attract attention. She glanced over her shoulder...

The villagers were still rebuilding and some were even now setting out tables for an outdoor feast, celebrating their victory as well as filling their bellies before rebuilding. The scent of fresh bread filled her nose and it made her eyes sting with unshed tears...

She didn't want to leave. According to their traditions it was _forbidden_ for her to leave.

But her father's orders were clear.

Taking a deep breath, the young mare slipped out of the gate and closed it behind her, striding off through the forest proper before she broke into a swift canter, leaving Fiador Village far behind her.

To Hayrule Castle Town she would go.

2. Run Free

The road that led in and out of Shadowleaf Forest was long and winding; her hooves beating against the packed dirt of the wagon trail that led out of the forest proper, the cloak billowing out behind her a bit as she cantered along the path. Skyward wished she could have said goodbye to her brother, but she knew her sire didn't want her to be seen leaving, and with good reason.

A Haylian pony without a cutie mark was not considered a full adult yet: foal at worst, adolescent at best, and it was forbidden for anypony without a cutie mark to leave their village for any reason. Unless their journey was sanctioned by the three village elders, and all had to agree on such a request. Doing so without their explicit permission would result in either being banished permanently or earmarked for shame until they earned their cutie mark. The mare winced at the thought of wearing a heavy, plain cold iron ring in her right ear until she bore that Nayru-damned mark on her flank that would enable her to ascend to adulthood and earn her surname, and snorted, laying back her ears.

Sometimes law and bureaucracy really sucked plot.

Granted her sire was good friends with the earth pony village elder, Granite Edge, but she prayed to the Goddesses he wouldn't land in trouble for sending her out beyond Fiador's borders even if she

didn't have her mark...

The forest's gloom began to lighten, and she smiled, knowing she was reaching the end of the forest pathway, and picked up speed a little bit. Shadow gave way slowly to sunshine, the cool shade of the forest lessening and the full glory of the sun's rays shining down from a bright blue sky dotted with clouds, with naught but rolling emerald green hills ahead of her as far as one's eye could see, with the occasional stand of trees and rock formations dotting the landscape...

This was Hayrule Field.

Skyward shook off her hood and smiled, inhaling deeply of the clean, crisp air and stomping one hoof in excitement. She'd heard stories from the foragers and the healers who went out to gather herbs, or even went to Hayrule Castle Town proper for trading their produce and dairy products from the goats and cows they kept...

Buck the stories...the reality was so much better! She stepped out off of the path onto the springy grass, giggling like a foal as she pranced, reveling in the feeling of sunwarmed grasses against her hooves. She reared abruptly and took off into a full gallop, laughing as she rushed down the slope. The open plains and the blue sky were so inviting, the wind in her mane and face, the bright sun streaming down upon her back, its rays warming her through. She dashed across the grassy flatland with nary a care in the world, laughing like the foal she once had been years ago. The scent of fresh water caught her nostrils, and she turned her head towards it, skidding slightly as she tried to slow down. She followed her nose (and her ears) to a rushing stream cutting through the Field proper. She sniffed at it...the water was moving fairly quickly, so with all the turbulence she couldn't tell if there was anything underneath. Glancing from left to right, she pricked her ears as her horn began to glow silver, and she levitated a sphere of river water out of the churning current. Tentatively, she lifted it to her muzzle and began to drink...it was clean, thank Farore, and fresh. She drank it down, and went to 'reach' for another...

HSSSSSSSSS!

The unicorn mare recoiled at the noise, her magic bringing the sword and shield out, blade in a guard stance and shield in a defensive angle. She yelped when something struck her left side, and hissed in pain, turning towards the direction the projectile had come from...

It was floating in the water, just poking its shell covered head out of the rushing fluid. Glowing green eyes glared at her from under the shell's lip as it bobbed up and down, making its way towards the shore. Slimy purple colored tentacles ending in sucker covered tips erupted from the water to cling to the rocks on the shoreline, its mouth pursing as it inhaled...

Skyward brought up her shield, hearing a loud SPANG as the rock the Octorok had spat at her struck its surface. It rebounded off the shield and flew into the water...she began backing up, blocking more shots from the beast, but not one of the rocks struck the evil little purple thing. Finally, she had just about enough; scowling viciously, she lowered her head enough to shoot at it with an ice spell. A beam

of frosty light erupted from her horn, streaking towards her foe...

CRACKLESPACKLEZZZZZZZZING!

On impact, the spell froze the monster in a solid block of ice, which began to float away downstream as the current was going southwards. She smirked victoriously as she twirled her borrowed sword and replaced the sword and shield on her back, turning to leave the river. She continued across the field...but soon noticed that the shadows had grown rather long, and she frowned, looking up at the sun...

Her mouth fell open in shock: it was almost bucking sunset?! How much time had passed? Goddesses time flew by when you got into a scrap! Her sire's words echoed in her head, a warning as she broke into a run, going back to the pathway she could see further down the way.

(...do not travel through Hayrule Field at night. Stop at Bridleriko Village for the night, then make haste with all speed to Hayrule Castle Town before the next eve falls...)

Before dark...

It became very clear to her then: there were actual monsters here, this wasn't the village or a pleasure jaunt, and if she wanted to survive, she'd damn well better do what she had been commanded to do! Din's flaming mane, if she was lucky she'd make it there just after sunset at this rate!

This is what you get for goofing off Skyward, you moronic little foal! Your sire gave you a mission to carry out, so snap to it soldier or you won't live to see the next dawn!

Her horn glowing silver, she cast a haste spell on herself, similar to the one she had used last night to increase her speed, and galloped as fast as she could, raising a cloud of dust behind her. The sun continued its descent across the sky, and as the air grew cooler, the sky began to change colors...

HOOOOOWWWWWLLLL! YIP YIP AWWWWWOOOOOOOOOWWWW!

The bloodchilling ululation sent a shiver down her spine, and she risked a glance over her shoulder. She saw nothing in the growing dusk, but she continued to run; it wasn't even dark, but the cries were clear enough...it was a Wolfos, but how close it was, she knew not, and she kept running, praying it was just one and not a whole pack.

Haylian ponies, be they earth, unicorn or pegasi foal from the time they could walk, talk/show signs of magic/flight skill, were gathered together each day and taught to fight. They were taught to build muscle and stamina by running obstacle courses and carrying around stones tied to their bodies, being tested by unicorns for what sort of magic they were best suited for, pegasi gauged their 'flock' for flight skills and timing, each day for an hour, and that time increased as they grew older, planting and harvesting time and chores permitting of course. If it was raining, they were training. If it was snowing, they were training. If it was a dry, hot day, they were

training. Most ponies would call this cruel and unusual punishment and foal abuse, but the outlying Haylian provinces scoffed at the soft city ponies who lived in Hayrule Castle Town. _They_ had the Haylian Castle Guard, and with the skirmishes and battles going on in the Barren Wastes against the Gerudo pony tribe in the west, the army could not afford to come to the aid of the villages scattered throughout the kingdom...

Meaning that it was up to them to protect themselves.

But Princess Zelda's father, King Valion Hayrule knew that without proper instruction, they would not stand a chance against enemy forces and thieves, and so many, many years ago he sent a few of his royal guards to each village to teach them how to fight effectively, and heal the wounds of their fellow ponies. Eventually, some of the guards decided to remain in those villages and ever since that time long after his death, every village was armed and ready to fight if the raiding parties or a skirmish happened within Hayrulean borders. So too it was with Skyward, who had been born to Mossy Boulder and Inferno Flare, a unicorn mare whose fur, tail and mane resembled a roaring bonfire; gold with streaks of red. But Inferno Flare had died of chillcore sickness when Skyward was four years old and her brother Tempest was nine, leaving Mossy Boulder to care for both his foals, with the aid of the village.

Skyward pricked her ears as a scuffling, clicking noise made itself soon known to her, along with heavy panting, then a low, bloodthirsty growl and she increased her speed, risking a glance over her shoulder...

The Wolfos chasing her was a medium sized one, with a tawny colored coat, but in the fading light it looked almost black. Its blazing orange eyes focused on her, its long red tongue hanging out of its maw as it salivated at the thought of feasting upon pony flesh. Skyward's mind raced as she struggled to think past the panic rising in her chest...Bridleriko had to be close; just had to be close by!

By Din's almighty teats, where were the glow of the gate lamps?!

The Wolfos snarled, increasing its own speed...Skyward felt anger surge through her at the thought of failure and she suddenly stopped short. She coiled her back legs, tensing up as she looked over her shoulder; the beast letting out a savage bay of victory as it sprang upon her, its razored teeth ready to rend flesh...

Only to get a vicious faceful of the mare's rear hooves, and sent sprawling backwards with an agonized howl. There was a sickening crack when her hooves connected with the Wolfos's face, but she paid it no mind, taking off once more into the night in a blur of dark blue and indigo. Up ahead, twin points of light gleamed in the distance, and she could have cried in relief upon seeing them. Down a hill, up a rise...and as she got to the very top, she beheld her destination as lamps were lit and sentries changed places along the stone pillar watchtowers. Bridleriko Village! At long last!

A wet sounding snarl echoed behind her and she spun around to see the wounded Wolfos scrambling to catch up to her, its paws scrabbling on the loose dirt and small stones. Blood ran from its jaw, which was

swinging oddly for some reason...

Stop bucking, staring and ****RUN**** you idiot!

She turned and bolted towards the gates, her horn glowing as she yanked something out of the saddlebags. It was a medium sized warhorn, carved of maple with leather cord tied to it. On either side of the horn was a raised carving of a rearing unicorn, it so lifelike it almost seemed as if it would leap off of the wood and start running. Skyward brought the horn to her lips and blew as hard as she could. The sonorous call of the horn echoed through the growing twilight-she blew on it again, gasping now as her stamina began to give out. She being a mare, she didn't have as much stamina as a stallion did...

Which was why she had removed her warhorn from her saddlebags to call for help.

Three pegasi flew from their posts at the watchtowers to answer the horn's call...the leader spotted the Wolfos and barked commands at his two subordinates, pointing down with one hoof. The one on the left, a pale green and white stallion, angled his wings and shot off high into the sky; the one on the right, a deep purple with black streaks in his mane and tail, folded his wings, readying his spear as he dropped from the sky, aiming right for the Wolfos chasing the cloaked figure...

Just as the pain maddened beast was about to pounce on the fleeing figure, a pale green/white pegasus stallion swept in from the side and scooped her up, out of harm's way. Thwarted of its prize, the beast let out a furious howl...a howl that ended in a death scream as the other pegasus divebombed him from behind, his spear lodging itself right in the back of the Wolfos's head, piercing its brain and going deep. The purple and black pegasus soared up, did a wingover and hovered well above the thrashing beast, waiting for the death throes to settle before he retrieved his weapon and flew back to the gates, where his wingpony and leader waited for him. They were seated by one of the watchtower entrances for earth ponies and unicorn; he made a face at the ichor covered spear and tossed it against the watchtower's wall, coming forward to see the newcomer for himself.

The pale green/white pegasus was offering the cowed newcomer a cup of cool water from a built in fountain close by...silver light surrounded the cup as the pony brought it to their muzzle to take a long drink, coughing briefly before they spoke; he knew it was a unicorn...and a mare.

"My...my deepest thanks, sons of the sky. This one is in thy debt...how might I repay thee for thy kindness?"

The third pegasus stallion chuckled, his voice deep and stentorian when he spoke. He was an eggshell white, with an ice blue mane and tail, and his cutie mark was that of a whirling trio of snowflakes.

"You owe us nothing, milady battlemage, save thy name?"

"I am Skyward, of Fiador Village. I am traveling with all haste to

Hayrule Castle on my sire's orders. Tis' most important I get there by tomorrow's sunset."

The three pegasi males looked at one another, noting the lack of completed name and the white/blue pegasus stallion nudged her gently. "Your sire sanctioned thy journey?"

"I know not, he knows the Elders well but spoke nothing of to them, he bade me go, with all haste...forgive me, I know not thy name, sir...?"

"Guard Captain Blizzard Burst, Skyward of Fiador. To my left is Jade Mist, to my right is Dark Wind, my wingponies. So your sire sent you to Hayrule Castle...who is your sire?"

"Mossy Boulder of Fiador, why?"

Blizzard Burst's other eyes widened in surprise and he peered closer to her, much to her consternation. "Mossy's your sire? Goddesses, so he did marry and have a filly...here I thought he wouldst have a colt!"

"My brother Tempest Wing was born first. I am the second born, Captain. My mother Inferno Flare died of chillcore when I was four seasons old," Skyward replied, her voice a bit snippy because she hated it when ponies compared her to her brother.

Blizzard Burst reached out with one wing and patted her shoulder. "Easy now; I meant no disrespect to thee or to thy clan. Why did thy father send thee alone? Not that thee did not give that vile beast what for...what didst thou do, cleave its jaw off? The wretch all but slavered its own blood."

"I stopped short and bucked it in the face, Captain; I had no choice but to slow it down somehow..._EEEEYYYYIIIIIIII!_"

The unicorn mare let out an unholy shriek and leaped off the stone bench she was sitting on, violently shaking her head and cursing a blue streak, given that the black and purple pegasus had just taken a drink of water himself and upon hearing what she had done to the Wolfos performed a spectacular spit take.

>Unfortunately, the mare in question was well within blast range, and she took most of it right to the face. Mane and face soaked through with stallion spit and spring water, she stomped her front hooves and pawed the ground preparing to charge at her offender, rage burning in her royal blue eyes. But Blizzard Burst got there first, sharply snapping a wing at her for her to stand down as he faced his chagrined wingpony.<p>

"The hay did you spit on her for, Dark Wind?! Explain thyself!"

Dark Wind instantly prostrated himself before his angry leader, backing his ears and tucking his tail, horrified at his own actions. "I meant no disrespect, sir; 'tis bad timing, Captain, I swear by the Goddesses! But one finds it hard to believe this mare bucked a Wolfos in the face and lived to tell the tale!"

"Given her sire was a Captain in the Haylian Royal Guard, it should come as no bucking surprise to you, soldier. Skyward might not have

her cutie mark yet but she sure as sunrise has proven her mettle out in the Field. Now, thou owes her an apology, and it had better be a good one or I am making thee muck out the town latrines for a moonturn, dost thou hear me?"

Dark Wind nodded his head as he approached the still angry unicorn mare and bowed to her, opening his wings to show his sincerity. "Milady, I humbly beg thy pardon for my foalish actions. Truly I meant no disrespect to thee. Name thy wish to salve mine honor, and I shalt see to it."

If one pony had offended another pony, they could name an honor price; which was the offended pony could choose the punishment for the offender, within Hayrulean laws, and in this case pending approval from his superior officer.

Skyward was more than tempted to request he be grounded for a solid week, but she knew she needed to get to Hayrule Castle Town before tomorrow evening, and above all else she would carry out her father's mission, her dignity be damned right now. "How fast can thee fly, Dark Wind?"

"I am quite fast, my lady. Jade Mist outstrips me by a wing's length, however...why dost thou ask?"

"If you can be spared thy post here at the gates I will need swift transport to Hayrule Castle Town at dawn. My sire gave me a mission and I will carry it through to the end, Goddesses strike me if I lie," came the cold reply as she stared him down.

Dark Wind glanced at Blizzard Burst, who stroked his chin with one hoof, thinking hard. He knew Mossy Boulder well, and he knew the earth pony wouldn't have defied his village's laws for nothing. Something stunk and it wasn't a rotting corpse, either. He needed to talk to Mossy Boulder, and sooner the better.

"Both of my lads shall get you to Hayrule Castle Town, Skyward. Thy sire sent thee for a solid reason, what is more, I knew thy father, and he does not usually go against the rules without a damned good reason. Jade Mist, take Skyward to the mares' barracks and make sure she is quartered for the night, unless you would prefer the town inn?"

"The barracks will be fine, Captain."

Blizzard Burst nodded at her approvingly, turning to look at Dark Wind. "I expect the both of thou to treat her with respect. At dawn, the two of thou will escort her to the gates of Hayrule Castle Town; and I do mean the gates themselves, not the damned bridge. Do I make myself clear?"

Both pegasi saluted their leader with a bellowed; "SIR YES SIR!" and Blizzard Burst gestured to Dark Wind. "Thou art coming with me. Jade Mist, take her to the barracks, make sure she gets food and a bath and find her a cot, then come back and find me."

The pale green/white pegasus saluted his captain and led the unicorn mare to the barracks, a long, low building hewn right into the stone walls of Bridleriko Canyon. He led her to the mess hall, and while she had herself a meal he spoke with the quartermaster, a large pale

green earth pony, who nodded and took herself off into the barracks sleeping quarters. After her dinner, which consisted of roasted corn, acorn squash and blackeyed peas with bread and cheese, and cool water, Skyward felt exhaustion steal over her and she yawned mightily, covering her mouth with one hoof. The matronly looking green pony with a cornucopia filled to bursting with food cutie mark on her flank chuckled at her when she met her at the door, Jade Mist giving her a nod and a smile before he left to rejoin his leader.

"Well, young filly, come this way and let's get thee a hot bath before bed, aye?"

Skyward wanted to facehoof-young filly her plot-but she knew she would be labeled as such since she didn't have her cutie mark yet. She brought her things into the bathing room with her, and after a nice hot bath, she followed the green mare into the sleeping area.

"Rest well, youngling. Thou fought well today. Thou made thy clan proud."

Skyward managed a tired smile in return as she turned back the covers with her hooves. She could have used her magic, but pffft, the Goddesses gave her four good hooves and she preferred using them for simple tasks. "Please, wake me at dawn...umm...what is thy name?"

The green pony smiled at her warmly over her shoulder. "My name is Bountiful Harvest. Rank: Quartermaster."

Skyward saluted her, and the mare returned it with a nod. "Sleep well, Skyward of Fiador. I shalt wake thee when dawn comes."

Skyward settled back into the rough linen sheets and simple blankets, closing her eyes as she fell almost instantly into slumber, curling up in the blankets, her brow furrowing a little in her sleep...

3. Mission: Impossible?

True to Bountiful Harvest's word, the earth pony mare woke her at dawn, cheerfully yelling in her ear that it was **TIME TO GET UP, SLEEPYHEAD! **

Skyward all but bounded out of the bed and stumbled, tangled in the simple linen sheets before she fell flat on her face, much to Bountiful Harvest's amusement. Head ringing and ears aching from the drill sergeant level wake up call she asked for, Skyward dragged herself out of the cot, scrubbing her face with one hoof and grumbling a little, but she got herself up and began rebrushing/rebraiding her mane and gathering her things together. She strode out into the greyish dawn, where Jade Mist and Dark Wind were waiting for her. Between the two of them there was a large, sturdy looking basket on wheels padded with straw and blankets sewn to the sides, lashed to them by strong leather harnesses. Coming from a forest village, Skyward had only heard of this sort of transportation...basket chariot travel was only used as a last resort when situations were dire, and clearly the Captain had exercised his rank to be sure she got a ride to the capital.

Bountiful Harvest stopped her before she could board, handing her a warm wrapped package with one hoof; the smell from it was slightly sweet...it was cornbread, she realized when she took it from the mare.

"I know not what thy mission is, missy, but ye clearly aren't taking thy time to fill thy belly. Take this with thou, and Goddesses speed ye on thy way!"

"May thy days be filled with glory and thy nights full of peace," Skyward returned, and saluted her before she climbed into the basket. The two male pegasi opened their wings wide and were soon airborne...glancing at her two escorts, Skyward opened the package Bountiful Harvest gave her and split the round loaf of sweet, crumbly bread into three pieces. The two pegasi were surprised at the unexpected treat that rose into view in front of them borne by a silver aura, but they certainly were not going to pass up the chance for an impromptu breakfast!

Jade Mist brushed the crumbs from his muzzle and glanced back at their passenger with a warm smile. "Kind of thee to share thy bounty, Skyward of Fiador."

Skyward quietly smiled back at him. "T'would be unfair if I kept it all to myself, Jade Mist of Bridleriko. Father always said a gift is sweeter when shared with friends. Besides, the two of thou look like thou did not get thy morning meal either?"

Dark Wind shook his head, licking the honeyed crumbs from his muzzle and giving her a wink. "Not with ol' Blizzard Butt nagging at us to get this chariot up and going, milady."

Skyward facehoofed, snickering and shaking her head. "Here now, have a care about what thy say about thy leader; thou do not know if he is nearby to hear such things, aye?"

Jade Mist laughed and Dark Wind guffawed at her. "Missy, the lot of the battalion say worse, but tis' all in good fun. I call him Snowfart on occasion."

Skyward smirked at him. "I see...is that why thy Captain is right there beside thou looking like a Wolfos waiting to pounce?"

Jade Mist actually turned white under his pale green coat and twisted his head around to look for his leader, but Dark Wind's uproarious laughter and Skyward's own giggling made him realize he'd been had! He snorted in amusement, grinning at the young mare.

"Minx, thou art. I shalt get ye for that later."

Skyward only gave him a 'bring it on' grin in return, and all three ponies shared a good laugh. The flight was noneventful, if not cold, making Skyward bundle herself in her cloak and look down over the lip of the basket. Hayrule looked so different from above...from this high, there was no sign of the beasts that plagued their homeland.

"Beautiful, is it not?"

She looked up at Dark Wind, who smiled at her, and she smiled back. "Aye. Shame my brother has wings and I do not; this is what I too could see if I had them..."

"Wings or no wings, thou art a lovely mare," Jade Mist told her with a gentle smile, and Skyward's eyes widened and she blushed scarlet under her fur, ducking her head under her cowl to hide her burning cheeks. Annoyed, Dark Wind swatted the back of his comrade's head with one hoof and glared at him in reproach. "Have thou no shame, Jade Mist? Thou embarrassed her; apologize at once!"

Jade Mist rubbed the back of his head with a wince, but expressed his apologies all the same; Skyward mutely nodded, choosing to look over the side of the basket again. She wasn't used to males flirting with her at all; most of the young stallions her age were just friends to her anyway. Then again, Tempest Wing was always glaring at any of them that got near her...

She stole a glance at the two of them again-Jade Mist was slimmer than Dark Wind, which accounted for his speed, but Dark Wind had a bit more muscle on him, and she had to hide a smile at how fit they both were...

"Hah! There 'tis, my lady mage! Behold, Hayrule Castle itself!"

Skyward looked up at Dark Wind's shout and she turned her head. The clouds were parting for the two pegasi as they made their approach...the slate blue peaks of the massive whitestone palace were rising out of the clouds proper as they made their descent. It truly was a sight to behold, seeing the majestic structure so close. The basket chariot circled before they landed on the eastern bridge leading into the town proper; much to Dark Wind's annoyance, Jade Mist unhitched himself and guided a blushing Skyward out of the basket, gesturing at the causeway into the city.

"And so have ye arrived, lady battlemage. Tell me, how do ye intend on traveling back to Fiador?"

"On hoof of course, Jade Mist, why dost thou ask?"

Dark Wind came up next to his comrade, giving her a light nudge with one wing, earning a stink eye from his partner. "If ye need a ride back to Shadowleaf Forest proper, t'would be our pleasure to return ye home."

Skyward smiled at them warmly. "I am honored by thy offer; mayhap I shall take thou two up on it, should I return to Bridleriko first. Fair winds to thou both!"

Before either pegasus could respond, she nuzzled them both and turned tail, galloping off towards the gates proper. Both stallions smiled foalishly after the mare, before noticing the others' expression and glaring at one another, wings ruffling and spreading wide in challenge towards the other.

"She nuzzled me first."

>"She did not."
"Tch, what would a beauty such as she find in a fluffbrain like _thou_"

>"Fluffbrain? Oh thou are one to talk, _Sir

Plothead_..."

The guards at the other end of the causeway couldn't hear the two arguing pegasi stallions from their distance, but it was pretty clear to why they were arguing, and they were both struggling not to bust a gut howling. They barely managed to keep straight faces as the unicorn mare in question approached their position and one of them moved to bar her path.

"Halt! State thy business in Hayrule Castle Town!"

Skyward jolted backwards at the forward statement, but she recovered her composure and held out the scroll, making sure they could see her father's seal.

"I am delivering an urgent message to the Princess on behalf of my sire, Mossy Boulder."

The guards looked at one another before they nodded and let her pass through the huge, heavy iron bound gates proper. Before them, the noise level was stifled, but once she passed behind them...

Ponies. Ponies EVERYWHERE. Never mind the NOISE.

Skyward looked around her at all the hustle and bustle-this was definitely NOT her village! The streets were paved with white cobblestone, stone houses and establishments, wealthy, middle class and poor ponies of all types; pegasi, unicorn, earth pony...

They were all over the place, buying wares, talking in groups, laughing and trading goods and jokes; she could hear music playing somewhere and hear the rhythmic stomp of hooves as well, and she twitched a little...

>She did like to dance, come to think of it...
Turning her head to the left, she blinked, seeing a bulky, brown colored pony...clearly an earth pony with a strange looking flower on his flank...it looked like a cross between a blossom and a bomb? Talk about WEIRD.

>He looked normal enough, white mane, pale gold brown coat except...he sparkled, as if he was made from some sort of polished rock-hay, he looked like he was a living statue anyway! There was an odd symbol placed high on his left foreleg...it looked like a diamond with three smaller diamonds placed left, center and right atop the larger one. Someone bumped her and grunted, and she hastily made her apologies, jolted back into reality. Time to deliver that message!<p>

She asked a town guard for directions to the palace, and the unicorn pointed the way there. Thanking him, she managed to get through the crowd, trying to keep her cloak from being pulled, pushed, shoved, or even dislodged. The Bridleriko ponies didn't mind her not having her mark too much, but Castle Town ponies? That, she wasn't so sure about and she definitely didn't want to find out anyway. Thinking about the Bridleriko ponies, she blushed a bit, thinking about Jade Mist and Dark Wind...they seemed like nice stallions, if a little forward. Then again, most pegasi were brash in nature anyway...

Chuckling to herself, she made her final approach to the grand gates of the palace...

Only to have twin spears crossed with a harsh _SCH-CLANG_ to bar her

path. One of the imposing guards was a huge pegasus, slate gray with a black mane, and he glared down at her through the slits in his helm.

"Nopony passes through the castle gates!"

"Sir, with all due respect, I have an urgent message to deliver to Her Royal Highness..."

"I said, **_**nopony passes through the castle gates!**_** Begone, before I have thee thrown in the dungeon for thy cheek!"

Skyward's ears turned back, but she knew there was no getting around it; he obviously meant business. She turned and walked back towards the market, and once she was away from the gates proper she sat beside a stone wall and put a hoof to her chin to think. How the buck was she going to get to the princess if those blockheaded horseapples for brains guards weren't going to let her in? She doubted using her sire's name would help this time; that massive pegasus guard did mean what he said, she had no doubt of that.

"Damn it, Skyward, think...there has to be a way," she muttered to herself as she got to her hooves and traveled further down into the market proper. She looked at some market wares...tools, weapons, fruit and vegetables...she purchased some vegetable seeds from one stall with some of the snaffles her sire had given her, and got some jewel apples from another stall to snack on. She munched on one of the apples...it was a bright sapphire one, and she smiled at the icy taste of the fruit, putting the rest of the bag in her satchel for later, not her saddlebags. Grumbling under her breath, she walked by the castle walls, shaking her head as she gazed up at the cold white and blue edifice.

So close yet so far...but she wasn't giving up. Not by a long shot.

She meandered further around the walls and saw two ponies loitering around close to the side near a service entrance doorway with an open window overhead, a stack of large crates close to them as well on a rolling pallet. Skyward's royal blue eyes narrowed upon seeing the window-that could be her ticket in, if she was lucky. Peering around the corner, she saw the two ponies...one was a mare and the other a stallion, both earth ponies and wearing the livery of the royal household. The problem was however she knew one of them would see her if she rounded the corner.

>How to distract them...?

Giggling caught her attention, and she turned her attention to them again; the mare was clearly the target of the stallion's affections, and she shook her head as the stallion tried stealing a kiss from the mare in question. Biting her lip, she regarded them, eyes casting about for anything she could use as a distraction without hurting anypony...

>The wind kicked up, as if a silent answer to her dilemma, and the mare squealed as the breeze caused her skirt to fly up around her, much to the stallion's amusement and pleasure, though he did mask that reaction with concern for the object of his affections. However, the dust that stirred and caused him to sneeze and cough brought the mare's concern to him in return. Upon seeing that, a devilish grin touched Skyward's muzzle. She shrouded herself with her cloak, and focused her magic.

There were two ornate looking lamps that hung low over the mare and stallion's positions, and she summoned another

brisk wind, smirking as she heard the mare squeal again, making sure the hem of her dress got caught on the lamp's outstretched hook, with a little arcane help from hers truly. But this time, she also moved the dust and dirt that was lodged in and around the pathway, and used it to blind the two ponies in question. Moving swiftly she ducked around them, jumped onto the stacked crates, and was in the window above the door before they noticed anything.

>In the cool, dark room, she pressed herself against the stone wall, waited a few tense moments to see if they noticed anything amiss. When no shout of alarm was forthcoming, only laughter and cooing from the stallion below, Skyward moved forward; stepping carefully as she could to avoid making noise as she edged towards the door she could see. Nayru's sacred teats, why the hay didn't Blazing Dawn teach her how to turn invisible yet? She passed by a mirror that was stored in the room, along with some boxes and sealed chests...and froze up when her cloak was suddenly pulled taut behind her. Out came her sword, and she whipped around, raising it high...<p>

Only to see the edge of the cloak had snagged on one of the mirror's feet.

Huffing out a breath of annoyance, cheeks tinging red, she unsnared her cloak, and re-sheathed her blade, shaking her head at herself.

>"Get it together, dammit," she muttered under her breath as she bunched the cloak and moved towards the door. She pressed her ear to the door; heard nothing, so she opened the door using her magic, just a crack...<p>

The scents of flowers, strange and exotic, fresh water, grass met her nose, and she slowly opened the door wider. In front of her was...

A stone entryway framed by tall hedges, and two massive pots of peonies and marigolds sitting stately side by side on either side of the entryway leading to the apparent hedgemaze in front of her. Laying back her ears, the unicorn glanced around...no guards here, apparently. Where was she now? She moved out proper and closed the door silently...only to dive behind one of the potted plants when she heard the 'clank-clank' of armor.

"Did you hear anything, sir?"

"Nothing to report here, Sergeant."

"Good. Carry on soldier."

Skyward waited until they were gone, and began to get up once more...only to freeze when she heard the clinking of something inside of her saddlebags. She winced-she'd have to leave them behind to make sure she stayed quiet. Glancing back at the door, she let herself back in, and pulled the message and the Snaffle Wallet out of her saddlebags and stuffed them into her satchel proper, making sure to cinch the strap tight so it wouldn't make noise. She shoved the bags in a dusty corner and covered them with a piece of linen she'd found in another open box, and slipped back out.

She slinked down the path and poked her head around the corner. No guard, so far. But the path split, going two ways...

She hid once again as the guard clanked past her, carrying a spear

and wearing polished steel plate armor. He was going to the right, apparently...

Skyward watched his movements carefully. He paused at where this hedge clearly ended, and then he turned the corner. She couldn't see through the hedge proper...it was too closely packed together for one, and the royal gardeners obviously knew their work. She watched him circle around once more before she took a deep breath...

And began following him from behind. She followed him as quietly as possible, ducking behind another hedge to avoid another soldier. She followed him around too, hiding behind a large ornamental pot filled with roses this time...purple ones. The smell tempted her, reminding her she'd only eaten that one apple but she gritted her teeth--there was just NO time for a snack right now. She ducked through the entryway, glancing around. Clearly entryways to other hedge-gardens were marked by the flowered pots. But which one led into the castle? She bit her lip as she snuck behind a few more guards...this was really starting to rag on her nerves. She ducked behind the pot again when the guard passed her, and this time, she went the other way. This hedge path opened up to a small garden...there was a shallow pool, several stacked baskets, a few empty large baskets, more baskets with linen and silk in them...

Hearing clanking hoofsteps coming up behind her and to the right, she ran for one of the linen baskets. Grasping some of it, she yanked it out and dove into it, burying herself in the silken white material, and covering herself with the rest, pushing the excess into another basket off to the side. Biting her lower lip, she waited with bated breath as another set of armored hooves sounded.

Both guards came into view...one a male unicorn, the other an earth pony. "Tch...high security and for what, exactly? Remind me why we're doing this again, Shatter Point?"

The unicorn heaved a sigh and cleared his throat a few times before speaking in a very deep and obnoxiously pompous tone of voice. " _'By order of High Chancellor Gilded Lock, there is to be no visitors until further notice due to the threat of war with the Gerudo tribe.' _ Bah! Horsefeathers the lot of it! We are already at war and the damn foal can't even see that because he has his gilded head shoved all the way up his perfumed plot!"

Skyward stuffed her cloak in her mouth to keep from braying with laughter the way the earth pony guardsman was. He slammed a hoof against the ground, laughing fit to split until tears ran from his eyes. He jerked off his helm and sniffed, shaking his dark brown mane and chuckling.

"Forgive me, my brother in arms. It..it is just so damned funny when thou imitate His Lordship..."

Shatter Point chuckled at the earth pony, giving him a shove with one shod hoof. "All right, all right. One shalt admit it is amusing. But, come, hurry, we cannot be found tarrying here for long, Golden Marble."

"Aye, aye, I know. Thankfully the princess is sensible."

"Praise be to the Goddessses for that."

"I say, where art the laundry maids? Were they not supposed to deliver these to Her Highness's bedchamber yet?"

"Ah, 'tis lunch time, remember? Speaking of which, the Princess is likely in the Ruby Garden having her own lunch. Let us go get ours, brother, I am starving!"

The two guards left...and Skyward popped out of the basket of silk, shaking herself. That was a close one to be sure!

Ruby Garden. Right then. Ruby...red...red roses, perhaps? She'd figured out by this point that the pots with flowers signified a new entry to the next garden, so maybe if she found red roses, or red flowers, she'd find the princess. She moved forward, checking for the guards, and skirted down the hedges again. Blue flowers...nope. She ducked down another hedgeway and rounded the corner...yellow peonies...

>Ugh.
Pink azaleas was next. She was about to give up hope when she rounded another hedge after trailing yet another guard's shining armored rear...

>She spotted not a pot, but a huge trellis of crimson roses framing a graceful marble archway with the Triforce symbol set high above it and a broad smile touched her muzzle. Finally! She checked for guards, saw none, and stepped out towards the entrance. Closer and closer she came, following one of the guards. He stepped around the corner, and she approached the rose trellised entrance...<p>

"Hoi! Who art thou?! Thou art not allowed in here!"

Aw, buck.

Skyward snapped her head around...realizing too late there had been a second guard and he had decided to reverse his travel path. She bolted into the trellised entrance, the guards shouts rising behind her along with the rapid pounding of hooves. She burst through the entrance and into a beautiful rose garden. White marble inlaid with gold was the floor plan, the lush emerald beds of thorned blossoms laid out in a rainbow of color; blue, purple, yellow, orange, red...there seemed to even be one that was multihued in color. Fountains spouted crystalline water from three sides, each statue akin to one of the Great Golden Goddesses themselves-Din, Nayru and Farore, respectively. In the center of this rainbowed tableau was a white dining table, and seated at that table was none other than Princess Zelda of Hayrule herself.

Zelda's coat was a beautiful alabaster white hue, and her mane was akin to flowing sunshine, a golden living river of honey that draped to the floor, some of it tied back in braids. Her great wings were also snowy white, neatly folded to her sides, and her lavender and white gown was made of the finest silk, gilded with golden ornaments and thread, the crest of the Royal Family emblazoned on the front. A golden diadem set with a single large rose colored diamond in the center graced the princess's head, enhancing her long white horn that rose from the middle of her forehead. The princess's eyes were a warm cerulean hue, much lighter than Skyward's own eye color. The princess was clearly dining on some sort of berry trifle, but looked up in surprise when Skyward clattered into the garden proper. The unicorn skidded to a halt in front of her, and removed the message from her pouch...but it went flying into the air and landed right in the

princess's meal like a mock unlit candle when three royal guards rushed in, one of them a familiar looking earth pony. He rushed forward, throwing the spear he carried at her-Skyward snared it in midair and threw it aside...

But it turned out to be a distraction, because she then shrieked in pain when he landed on her full force and dimly heard something go 'crack'...

The searing pain however was the match to the tinder...anger roared high inside her...she couldn't fail, not here, not now...

And she twisted her head around and summoned all her magical strength, her horn erupting in silver flame...

One second earlier Golden Marble was body slamming the cowed intruder to the ground...the next he found himself sailing through the air...before he crashed into the wall with the echoing sound of a large bell ringing and fell right into the azure rose bushes with a howl of pain. Even though he was wearing armor, what could get into the nooks and crannies was painful enough.

The second guard was a unicorn...Shatter Point. He charged the female unicorn...she was in pain from a cracked rib, but she was obviously not going to go down without a fight. She reared and lashed out with her sword, blocking his spear strike. They struggled for dominance...Skyward struck out with a front hoof thrust, which he moved back from...she used that split second to hit him with a fire spell and he shouted in pain as the superheated armor seared his skin...

While all this was going on, Princess Zelda's shimmering golden aura wrapped around the scroll that had landed in her food. When her eyes lighted on the seal holding the scroll shut, they widened and she spun towards the melee just as the third guard, a pegasus, shot down and bucked Skyward into the western garden wall. Skyward, dazed from the painful armored kick, waited for the inevitable unforgiving impact against cold marble that was sure to come...

But it never came.

She glanced around, blinking at the golden glow that had suddenly surrounded her. The pegasus...an electric yellow one from the hue of his wings, started forward to capture her proper, but one graceful alabaster hoof swept outwards in a regal gesture, stopping him in his tracks.

"Neigh, Thunderous Maelstrom. This mare is no threat. Return to thy posts, all of thee...ah, Golden Marble, allow me to aid thou..."

The princess levitated the dusky golden colored earth pony guard out of the thorns and carefully picked out any remaining brambles from his armor. "A thousand thanks, Your Royal Highness. Shall we take the intruder to the dungeons?"

"Neigh, Golden Marble. We shalt speak with her. In truth, I hath been expecting a visitor from Shadowleaf Forest, and 'tis this young mare who hath been chosen."

By this point, Zelda had placed Skyward on the ground, and the young

mare gasped for breath. She coughed harshly and blood splattered from her mouth onto the pristine marble; upon seeing that, Shatter Point moved forward...and flattened himself to the ground when Skyward whirled on him, a lance of thunder erupting from her horn and flash frying a small ornamental tree on impact.

"Away from me, thou armored son of a chimera! Touch me again and it shalt be thy funeral!"_ the mare roared, rearing and slamming her hooves against the marble harshly...then gasping for breath again. Princess Zelda realized that the young unicorn mare had been injured in the fight, and she firmly shooed her guards away, approaching Skyward carefully. "Ye bear great courage and magic prowess, to be certain. What is thy name, young one?"

Zelda's horn began to glow as she gently passed it over the shaking mare's body, who bowed her head before her princess.

"I am Skyward of Fiador, Princess Zelda, second foal and daughter of Mossy Boulder and Inferno Flare. I pray thou wilt forgive my sire, Mossy Boulder. I do not yet bear my cutie mark, yet he sent me all the same."

"Ye need not beg forgiveness; there is naught to forgive...I shalt sanction thy journey, never fear. Thy father sent thee to me for two reasons..one, to deliver this message, and second..."

The princess looked down at her with a gentle smile. "He hath requested me to have thee trained in Nayru's Arts."

Skyward's eyes bugged out at this piece of news and she turned to stare up at the alicorn above her in shock. Her father...

Had requested...

Princess Zelda...

To have her trained in Nayru's Arts?!

The princess smiled benevolently at her as she finished casting her healing spell, mending the cracked rib and the torn muscles the young mare had. There would be a little pain, but no more spitting blood or labored breathing to be certain. "...Wha...what...Princess, I beg thine pardon for asking...what makes you so certain that...that I am worthy of..."

Princess Zelda gestured for Skyward to follow her, and indicated for her to sit at the table with her. She poured a glass of ruby strawberry juice for her guest, and took a drink from her own cup.

"Mossy Boulder was once my late father's Captain of the Guard. He retired, mainly because he had fallen for thy mother, Inferno Flare, and wished a quieter life, away from the hustle and bustle of the town. He is a very dear friend of the family, and I told him should he have any foals, that if he deemed them worthy to send them to me to be trained in the battle arts of Nayru's Wisdom."

"But I hath not even earned my cutie mark yet..."

"That wilt come in time, Skyward. You show great promise...your sire

trained thee well. Considering the guile and skill thou used to get into the castle and slip past mine own guardponies, it shows thy sire taught thou well. Wilt thou accept thy training?"

The resounding joyful whoop of acceptance from the younger unicorn, never mind the impromptu victory prancing in the garden made the princess smile broadly at her newest student, for that was all the answer she needed to hear. Her joy at finding a new student briefly overcame the dire news she had received from her retired Captain of the Guard, that Ganondorf's forces now included demons and dark creatures...

End
file.